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Permanent Weight Control

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Why Traditional Diets Fail

Research has shown that 98 percent of the individuals who engage in commercial diet strategies will regain their lost weight within a year. To understand why most diets fail in the long run, consider some of the components of traditional diets:

- time limitations (diet for only two weeks)
- strict calorie limits
- prescribed menus or combinations of foods (some foods are labeled “bad” or “off limits”)
- focus on “willpower”

None of these components actually contribute to the learning of new behaviors, attitudes, or lifestyles. Since overeating and inactivity are in themselves learned behaviors, programs which do not seek to change these are doomed to fail. *Permanent weight loss is achieved only by learning an entirely new lifestyle — one that is tailored to individual needs.*

All traditional diets involve strict guidelines and place responsibility for weight loss on either external factors or a particular quality of character such as willpower. Such diets create a temporary, artificial change in a person’s life — but it is not a life-long or lasting change. Thus, having completed the strict requirements of your diet for the allotted period of time, you simply return to the bad habits which caused the weight problem originally.

Changing Eating and Exercise Habits

You gain weight when your calorie intake (food and drink) exceeds what you expend through exercise and basal metabolism. Therefore, to lose weight, you must use up more calories than you take in. And while it is possible to lose weight without exercise, doing so is more difficult and may be hazardous to your health. Losing weight merely by limiting food intake requires radical food restrictions. Exercise, on the other hand, helps burn up calories and provides other important benefits. It helps regulate your appetite so that you are better able to recognize when you are actually hungry (not merely bored) and it suppresses your appetite for a considerable period of time after you have finished exercising. Exercise also changes body metabolism and burns up the body's fats while maintaining necessary muscle tissue.

Why Willpower Alone Will Not Work

It doesn't take willpower to lose weight — it takes self control. The difference is simple. With willpower you must *resist* those foods you enjoy; with self-control you *remove* any temptation and external cues that lead to automatic eating. An example may make this easier to understand. If you like candy and there is a dish of it near the television, it would take willpower to resist it each time you watch TV. However, if you remove the candy, you won't constantly be faced with the temptation to eat it. "Out of sight, out of mind" is an excellent approach to securing self-control. Self-control can be learned, whereas willpower is a character trait you must summon from within yourself.



Steps in Learning Self-Control

There are many self-control techniques which can be learned. *The first step is to analyze your eating and activity patterns.* Do you overeat when bored, lonely, depressed, angry, frustrated, or tense? Do you eat too fast — and not taste your food? Do other activities distract you while you are eating (watching television)? Do you act as your own worst enemy with statements such as “I’ve already gone over my calorie allotment, I may as well forget my goals today” or “I’ll never be able to lose the weight I want”? Do you find that others sabotage your efforts to control your weight? Do you put off exercise indefinitely?

The second step is to determine what specific solutions are needed for each problem pattern. Avoid seemingly simple solutions such as “I won’t eat between meals.” Rather, focus on *how* to avoid eating between meals — eliminating the purchase of snack-type foods or even leaving the house or apartment will eliminate the temptation. Other suggestions are presented later.

The third and final step is to try each solution for a specific period of time and evaluate its effectiveness after the time has passed. Modify and change your original plan if your goals have not been reached. If you have made progress, continue your plan and practice diligently — with time, it will become a new habit.

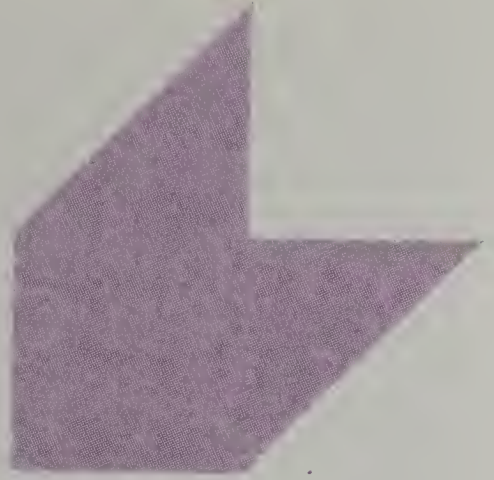
How to Lose Weight

Before beginning any exercise or weight-loss program, consult your physician for possible precautions. A safe and attainable weight loss goal is considered to be one to two pounds per week until you reach a desirable weight for your body frame and height. While this weight loss may sound slow, it allows you to lose body fat rather than water and muscle. With more rapid weight loss, you lose water and muscle but not body fat; this weight loss is generally regained because the body fat has not been decreased. A constant weight loss/weight gain cycle is unhealthy for your body, particularly your kidneys. To achieve a one- to two-pound weight loss per week, combine exercise with a balanced diet of no less than 1,200 calories per day to ensure that your body is getting its required daily nutrients.

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It is unrealistic to make changes you can't live with permanently. As you consider restricting your food intake, don't automatically eliminate the foods you enjoy — rather, stay within your desired calorie range by reducing the amount you eat of such foods. Be cautious of high protein/high fat diets which are geared for rapid weight loss and not permanent weight loss. A high carbohydrate, low protein, low-fat diet which includes such foods as fruits, vegetables, whole-grain cereals and breads, and a reduced amount of meat is excellent.

As you consider an exercise program, find an activity you enjoy that is also convenient, affordable, and moderately strenuous. Begin exercising at a reasonable pace and increase this pace slowly. An acceptable program consists of a minimum of thirty minutes of exercise three-to-four times per week (this includes a warm-up and a cool-down session, both are necessary to prevent injury). If possible, set up a daily routine consisting of a specific exercise time and try to exercise before a major meal to maximize appetite suppressant effects. Remember that the emphasis is on *permanent lifestyle change* — those changes in eating and activity that you can maintain for the rest of your life.

Suggestions to Help the Process Along

- Remove food from rooms other than the kitchen.
- Place foods in “see-proof” containers and store them out of reach; keep lower calorie foods more available.
- Eat in only one room and one location in that room.
- Make eating an activity in and of itself (do not read a book or watch television while eating).

- Eat slowly (take smaller bites, chew longer, put utensils down and sip water between bites). Try to be the last person finished eating.
- Preplan meals and measure all helpings. Save a portion of your preplanned meal for snacks at a later time.
- Weigh yourself once a week at the same time of the day. Keep accurate records.
- Make a list of activities you can substitute for eating. When you feel the urge to eat, refer to the list.
- Introduce a delay (set a timer for five minutes) between the urge to snack and when you actually eat. Occupy yourself with another activity for that period of time, and it may eliminate the need to eat.
- Turn self-defeating statements such as "I'll never lose weight" into self-helping statements such as "It will take time to lose weight, but it's worth it in the long run."

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